



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION 6

1445 ROSS AVENUE, SUITE 1200

DALLAS, TX 75202-2733

MAY 13 2010

Ms. Peggy Hatch
Secretary
Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ)
P.O. Box 4313
Baton Rouge, LA 70821-4313

Dear Secretary Hatch:

We appreciate the joint effort with the LDEQ and other Gulf Coast states to collect accurate air quality data to determine the impact of the BP Oil Spill. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) posts air sampling results and perspectives on public health impacts on a web site (<http://www.epa.gov/bpspill>) for public review. We understand that your office has received questions regarding levels of hydrogen sulfide and hydrocarbons and that various reports have been posted that raise concern. To date we have been able to report that, although there are reports of odors, levels of total hydrocarbon and hydrogen sulfide are well below levels of concern for public health impact.

The specific discussion of impacts of these pollutants measured in Louisiana is provided below. Note that we also include some discussion of data errors for hydrogen sulfide levels previously reported:

"Total Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs)

Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) are not tracked in the Air Quality Index, but EPA is monitoring VOCs along the Gulf Coast due to the BP Oil Spill. At present, EPA screening for VOCs show very low levels, specifically less than 6 parts per million, at sites established specifically in response to the oil spill. To date, these levels of VOCs detected are far below any level of concern. We continue to receive reports that people along the affected area can smell these compounds but being able to smell them does not mean that they are present at harmful levels. The gas-station like odor described by Gulf Coast residents likely includes compounds such as benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene, xylene, and naphthalene. We will keep monitoring VOCs closely and will keep the public informed. "

Hydrogen Sulfide near Venice, LA:

EPA is monitoring for hydrogen sulfide (H₂S) at a number of locations near Venice and Chalmette, Louisiana, and Mobile, Alabama. Hydrogen sulfide smells like rotten eggs and can be smelled below levels that can be accurately detected by the screening monitors used for emergency response. In reviewing data to date, EPA discovered that we have erroneously reported several elevated levels near Venice. Our current data indicate H₂S levels are well below any level that could cause long-lasting health effects. The source of H₂S in these areas is unknown."

In addition to these evaluations, EPA expects to add reports on speciated hydrocarbon air pollutants. We appreciate the critical role you and your staff perform to collect quality environmental data. Please let me know if you have any questions, or your staff may contact Ms. Maria Martinez, Chief of our Air Quality Section at 214-665-2230.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Edlund', written in a cursive style.

Carl E. Edlund, P.E.

Director

Multimedia Planning
and Permitting Division